

## [Irene Jackson]

26033

7-21-39

Ruth [D?] Bolton

Jackson, Irene

[2115?] Wishart Street

South Jacksonville, Fla.

"You mean the woman with the guitar coming down the street? We call her 'Dink' but her real name is Mrs. Irene Jackson.

"Yes, she is blind, and that guitar is her constant companion."

Irene is wearing a figured dimity dress that is becomingly cut and nicely done up. Her shoes are designed for walking and her white straw hat looks very nice on her. All in all, she is a neat person. She is able to attend to herself personally and it is apparent that she takes pains to keep herself clean.

"Mrs. Jackson, please tell me something of your life?

"I don't see why you want to know about it because there is nothing important about it, but since you ask, I guess you must want to know, so I will tell you what I can remember.

"I was born September 19, 1899, in South Jacksonville, Florida. My mother's name was Abbie Sandlin and my father was Allen Sandlin. There were seven children in our family, 4 girls and 3 boys and we were a happy group, if you want to [know?]. I spent much of my

## Library of Congress

time playing with the neighborhood children as I was the youngest girl. I attended school and was very smart in my studies.

“When I was a child I delighted in playing all sorts of games and got into many little fights in which I came out the worse off very few times. We used to play school, I was always 2 the teacher for the children looked up to me a lot. Singing was always where I would [shine?] and I did pretty good when it come to reciting. We had a swimming hole out there in South Jacksonville and even after I got grown I hated to see it filled up and houses built on it. I had a hard time learning to swim but the kids kept [razzing?] me until I decided I would learn that day. Well, I went in with then and nearly drowned, but I have always been a determined cuse and when I found out that I had to swim or drown, I swimmied.

“There are several incidents that stand out in my memory, one was the severe beating I got for letting Bernice, my little niece, fall out of the tree. She was just a toddler then and when she fell, she sprained her feet, and my mother beat ne almost to death.

“Another one was [once?] I was on the ferry boat going to Jacksonville, I saw eight people get drowned. These people were on a dredge boat and all at once a storm out of nowhere just came up and the captain of the ferry boat had all that he could do to keep us from turning over. The storm raged and the dredge boat rocked and ranted. Finally it turned over and those eight people all drowned. The ferry boat hit the wharf with such a crash that it jarred everybody on it, and most of the passengers got hurt, but not a scratch did I get.

“Where did you go to school?

“I went to the Florida Baptist [Academy?] when I was 14. It was in Jacksonville then and called that, but now it is in St. Augustine and known as Florida [Normal?] and Industrial Institute.

## Library of Congress

We used to pay \$1 a month. I studied sewing and music. I used to go to Sunday School and church all the time and was converted at the age of 15. I was elected to go as a delegate every time the Sunday School or B. Y. [P?]. U. had to send one. When I was 14 my father died and this sure put a crimp in me. I had to quit school and this nearly broke my heart for I wanted to finish so I could teach. I was in the 11th grade then. Three days after my father died, my sister Bessie died, and she left a little baby girl eighteen months old, whose name was Bernice. This kept me from playing like I used to because I had to look after her. You see, by my father dying, Mamma had to work very hard then to take care of us. While she went outside to work I had most of the work to do at home. While my father lived, she did not have anything but her housework to do as he always make a good living as a carpenter and we had as nice a things as anyone else in our neighborhood, most of the time we had better things. I do not know how much he made but he was certainly able to provide for us. My mother worked after his death doing domestic work, I don't think she made very much. She could not save any money because she did not make so much and she had not been [??] to handling it much either, so we had a right hard time of it sometimes. Often the things were very hard and we could not get along and I would wish I was able to do something to help her. We did not know where the next meal was coming from at times but in some way she made a way to get us one. She always taught me to be brave and take whatever 4 comes like a good trouter. I loved my mother dearly and there are things that she taught me that have helped me to meet the world today.

"When I was seventeen years old, I met and married C. W. Williams. He was a medium height dark brown skinned man, a mill hand and very selfish. I had two children by him. I don't think that a woman should have any more children than she can take care of decently. You know it is [?] as easy to raise children now as it was when I came along. You did not give them so much cod liver oil and things like that, things were cheaper and you did not need as much education. You were born, married and died. Now you are born, educated, careered, married then you die. We moved to Melbourne after we got married.

## Library of Congress

This man turned out to be the meanest man in captivity. He would beat me for nothing; just seemed like he got a kick out of hearing me holler, and after I found out that by hollering he would stop, man I put up some squawking then. You know girls at even seventeen now, wouldn't think of letting a man get away with this - I wouldn't either now.

"After I had my second child, I was very, very, sick. My no good husband did not give me the proper treatment and when you add to that, that I was weak from so many beatings, you can see what a time I had. My mother sent for me to come home. Before I got up from this illness, my sight started to get dim. Dimmer and dimmer it got until just as I turned 19 I was blind. I went to ever so many eye specialists but to noavail.

Mrs. Jackson is rather sensitive in connection with her 5 blindness.

"Now here I am with two children and blind. Three added burdens to my mother, she must take care of me and my two children. She willingly accepted the responsibility of us and did the very best she could by us.

"My mother died in 1926 and that was the worse time I ever had to face. You know being blind is almost a [calamity?] when you have your mother to help you over the bumps, and when she died it felt just about like a prop had been jerked out from under me. I then had to get adjusted all over again.

"You know the little girl that I had to look after when her mother died and left her a little baby? Well, she had to look after me then. Even Stephen. Around in a circle, huh? She sent me money regularly from St. Petersburg. A few months after my mother's death, my oldest boy died, then I went to St. Petersburg and spent three months with Bernice. While I was there I certainly did fare well, she did not want me to leave, but I wanted to come on back home.

"Bernice looked after me until I married again. I met Henry Jackson, who is a short, dark brown, man and a very nice person. He was blind too, but we decided we could maybe get

## Library of Congress

along as good, as the other people, and married in 1930. I learned then that being blind did not keep you from earning a living if you worked hard enough. He had a guitar and he sure was patient learning me to play it. He would practice way in the night and wake up and start early in the morning 6 again. After we had breakfast, we would practice some more[;?] then it would be time for him to go out in the streets to play. I had always liked music and I soon learned to play good. After I had learned good enough we would go from one street to another, one city to another and from state to state, giving concerts, playing on the streets and at various churches. He would play and I would sing, and he would sing and I would play. While we were in Washington, D. C. he bought me a guitar from Sears & Roebuck and then we would both play and sing as we felt like it, sometimes he would be at one place and I would be at another. In this way we coined money. It was nothing for us to make from \$45 to \$60 clear one week, you know, both of us together.

“Tell me something of your life in the different cities where you went with your husband to play, wont you please?

“There is nothing to tell. [We?] were both blind and there was no need to spend money and time. We got a room at some place where they gave us board, attended to our business [that?] we went to do and left.

“In 1932 I found myself in family way and soon [had?] to stop going around. For about a year I stayed home. The baby died and then I started going with him again. We moved in our new house in June 1933. It is a six room bungalow that has never been painted. It leaks badly now but we 7 manage to keep dry if it storms because we know just not where to sit. We can still call it ours, anyway. The happiest day of my life I think, was when we moved in it. We did not owe one cent to anybody on it. We built it bit by bit, paying cash as we went along. We saved out just enough for us to live on and put the rest in the house and every nail and stick of wood that went in this house, we got it by singing and playing.

## Library of Congress

"We furnished it with what we had and a few pieces that people gave us, and what we could not buy spot cash, we did not have in that house, for we wanted to be very sure that what we carried in there, stayed in there. You know we could have got a heap of new furniture, but you can't depend on what people would give you.

"Mrs. Jackson's living room is the best furnished one in the house. There is a brown overstuffed tree piece suite, old style, but one that has been treated with care. The rug on the floor shows a deal of wear and was once a beautiful one. This room was very neat and clean. Her bedroom has an appearance of "comfort" The bed has been placed in the coolest spot, a table in reaching distance, a little rug that is laid lengthwise so that she can follow it to the vanity. The bench placed crosswise so she can just bend after reaching the vanity and find needed articles. Each article on her vanity has its place and the woman who helps her knows to put them exactly back in the same spot they were occupying.

8

"Mrs Jackson, how much do you pay this woman?

"Oh, I pay her nothing, not in money. She [has?] no place to live and we let her stay with us. When she is working she gets up early and does what she can. You see it is better this way for we both think we are helping each other. Sometimes she helps me cook.

"Helps you cook?

"Yes, helps me cook. You sound like you don't think I can cook. If nobody moves my things out of their place, I can turn out as good a meal as anyone else, at least I am satisfied.

"I do some of my washing too, my underpieces, because I don't have to iron them.

"It is a very good thing that we saved while we were making and put it to good use for after while the depression came along and people either did not have anything to give us, or they kept it, for we did not do near as well. Where we had been making \$45 to \$60 a week,

## Library of Congress

our money fell off to \$20 to \$30. But Henry was a good sport and we made out nicely. We had to stop traveling because the last two times we went off we had to take all what we made and [what?] we had already and find the cheapest way to get back. We stayed here and made the rounds and never fell below \$20 a week. Then in 1937 we were told that a law had been passed where you would be put in jail for begging on the streets and we put in for Aid to the Blind. The last part of that year we started getting it and me and Henry both get \$11 a month, that makes us have \$22 a month to live on wherein we used to have more 9 than that a week but by missing here and skipping there, we somehow manage to keep form starving.

“Mrs Jackson, how do you manage to live on \$22 a month?

“Live! There is no way to live on it, try to exist is what you should say.

At this point Mrs. Jackson laughed as though this was the funniest thing she had ever heard.

“We owned a car once but times got so hard we couldnot keep it up, so we sold the car and did some little things around the house.

“I never bother about voting because it is so inconvenient, and then I could not stand up all day like we have to do to vote and then sometimes the time is out they tell me and we (Negroes) have not voted yet. I thing that President Roosevelt is ‘just all right’ and I don't hold him responsible for the way they dish out the money for relief, he means for us to get our share just like the others, but he is not here to see and know about the way we are treated.

“All in all, I don't think my lot is as bad as some folks I know. Henry and me get along nicely and enjoy each other's company and we are in love with one another. Although we cannot live like we used to, we are happy. Out financial situation remains unsolved as it

## Library of Congress

looks like it will be hit and miss from now on. Most of the clothes we wear are given to us because we can hardly buy the cheapest kind.

10

"Our living standard is not as good as it used to be but we must have ups and downs like the other people. At one time in this community we were about the best livers.

"What do you do with your spare time?

"I go to school, four days a week, and Rev. Stuckey the instructor for the blind is teaching me how to make a lot of things that I might be able to sell if I learn to make them good enough and can buy the material. I can make belts and I am making a pocketbook now. I just finished a wine set made out of beads.

"What does you husband do in his spare time?

"He is a great churchworker and likes to visit his cronies.

"Of curse I will never stop singing until something happens to my voice or I die, for anytime anybody asks me to sing on a program and fixes a way for me to get there and back, I go, for I sure do love to sing.

"What is your favorite song?

" "Hold My Hand Precious Lord". That song has more feeling in it for me than any I know. It makes no [difference?] whether there is anybody there to hear me or not, I just like to sing.

"Why do you always carry the guitar, Mrs. Jackson?

"Well, you see, this guitar has been my support a long time, and after God I love my husband, myself and my guitar."

11



## Library of Congress

Mrs. Jackson has had quite a deal of coaching as she recites a [deal?]. She always gets someone who is supposedly good in English to read the poems to her and correct her. She made a very noticeable effort in giving this interview to use good language. Ordinarily I think she uses a few [idioms?].